

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMENIAN RITE OF THE LITURGY

There are five Armenian texts of the Liturgy now still in existence. These were probably texts evolved in different centers in Armenia, or in centers to the west and south of it. One of these five texts has later dominated the others and eventually put them out of use in the course of the fifth and following centuries.

Of these five Armenian Liturgies one was that of **St. Basil of Caesarea**. We have evidence from the first half of the fifth century that the Liturgy of St. Basil, as it was known and used in the great metropolis of Caesarea, was in common use in Armenia. We now have the text of this Liturgy, which can be called **Caesarean Basil**, because it is considerably different from the Liturgy known in the Greek Church as the Liturgy of St. Basil, which was subjected to changes much later than the time of St. Basil. This later form of St. Basil's Liturgy could conveniently be called Byzantine Basil.

Besides the *Caesarean or Cappadocean Basil* four other liturgies were used in the Armenian Church during and after the fifth century. These were probably all translations from Greek texts, which are now presumably lost. One of these four liturgies is the most complete. This is the one which, after undergoing certain modifications and changes, mainly consisting of additional hymns and litanies, has been in general use in the Armenian Church since the tenth century at the latest.

Although there are references to this Liturgy in the literature of the seventh and ninth centuries, the earliest complete text, which we have, does not go beyond the middle of the tenth century. Its language and its intrinsic evidence give us assurance to affirm that it was translated, and consequently used, in the fifth century.

Some of the features of the Armenian Liturgy reflect what is called the **Jerusalem rite**. This is due to the fact that in the fifth century, after 397 but before 431, the **Jerusalem rite of the Liturgy of St. James** was adopted by the church of Antioch, with which the Armenian Church has always been in close contact.

The few changes made in the Armenian Liturgy after the middle of the tenth century are almost all in the direction of the Byzantine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which has been the most widely used liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Church. There are also in the Armenian Liturgy some minor indications of the influence of the Roman Liturgy, as a result of the contacts which Armenians had with the Crusaders.

The Armenian Liturgy, which is now used, took its final form and became the dominant Liturgy of the Armenian Church sometimes after the year 950 but before 1177, which is the date when Nerses of Lambron wrote his commentary on the Liturgy. The first printing of it in 1706 gave fixity to its minutest details.